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Management of OCD in children

What is obsessive-compulsive disorder in children?

- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a type of anxiety disorder. Obsessions are recurring thoughts. Compulsions are recurring behaviors.
- A child with OCD has obsessive thoughts that are not wanted. They are linked to fears, such as touching dirty objects. He or she uses compulsive rituals to control the fears, such as excessive hand washing

- When a child has OCD, obsessive thoughts and compulsive rituals can become very frequent and strong. They may interfere with daily living and normal development. OCD is more common in teens.

What causes OCD in a child?

- The cause of OCD is not known. Research suggests it's a brain problem. People with OCD don't have enough of a chemical called serotonin in their brain.
- OCD tends to run in families. So it may be genetic. But it may also occur without a family history of OCD. In some cases, pediatric autoimmune neuropsychiatric disorder associated with streptococcal infection. A child may be diagnosed with PANDAS when: Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), tic disorder, or both suddenly appear following a streptococcal (strep) infection, such as strep throat or scarlet fever

What are the symptoms of OCD in a child?

Each child may have different symptoms. These are the most common symptoms:

- An extreme obsession with dirt or germs
- Repeated doubts, such as whether or not the door is locked
- Interfering thoughts about violence, hurting or killing someone, or harming oneself
- Long periods of time spent touching things, counting, and thinking about numbers and sequences
- Preoccupation with order, symmetry, or exactness
- Ongoing thoughts about doing offensive sexual acts or forbidden, taboo behaviors
- Troubled by thoughts that are against personal religious beliefs

- A great need to know or remember things that may be very minor
- Too much attention to detail
- Too much worrying about something bad occurring
- Aggressive thoughts, urges, or behaviors

Compulsive behaviors are the repetitive rituals used to ease anxiety caused by the obsessions. They can be excessive, disruptive, and time-consuming. They may interfere with daily activities and relationships. They may include:

- Repeated handwashing (often 100 or more times a day)
- Checking and rechecking many times, such as making sure that a door is locked
- Following firm rules of order, such as putting on clothes in the very same order each day
- Hoarding objects
- Counting and recounting a lot
- Grouping objects or putting things in a certain order
- Repeating words spoken by oneself or others
- Asking the same questions again and again
- Repeatedly using four-letter words or making rude (obscene) gestures
- Repeating sounds, words, numbers, or music to oneself

How is OCD diagnosed in a child?

- A child psychiatrist or other mental health expert can diagnose OCD. He or she will do a mental health evaluation of your child. To be diagnosed with OCD, your child must have obsessions and compulsions that are continuous, severe, and disruptive. They must harm your child’s day-to-day living.
- In most cases, the activities of OCD such as handwashing or checking the locks on doors use up more than 1 hour each day. They also cause mental health distress and affect how your child thinks. In most cases, adults realize that their actions are not normal to some degree. But often children can't see that their behavior is irrational and abnormal

How is OCD treated in a child?

Treatment will depend on your child's symptoms, age, and general health. It will also depend on how severe the condition is.

Treatment for OCD often includes a combination of the following:

- **Therapy with cognitive and behavioral methods.** Cognitive methods help a child identify and understand his or her fears. They also teach a child new ways to better resolve or reduce those fears. Behavioral methods help the child and their family make pacts or rules to limit or change behaviors. One example is setting a maximum number of times a compulsive handwasher may wash his or her hands.
- **Family therapy.** Parents play a vital role in any treatment process. A child's school may also be included in care.
- **Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs).** These medicines help raise serotonin levels in the brain.
- **Antibiotics.** Your child may need these medicines if his or her OCD is found to be linked to a streptococcal infection.

How can I help my child live with OCD?

OCD can be treated, often with a combination of one-on-one therapy and medicines. You play a key supportive role in your child's treatment. Here are things you can do to help your child:

- Keep all appointments with your child's healthcare provider.
- Talk with your child's healthcare provider about other providers who will be included in your child's care. Your child may get care from a team that may include counselors, therapists, social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists. Your child's care team will depend on your child's needs and how serious the OCD is.
- Keep strong and open lines of communication with your child. Children with OCD can feel embarrassed about their disorder.
- Tell others about your child's disorder. Work with your child's healthcare provider and school to create a treatment plan.
- Reach out for support from local community services. Being in touch with other parents who have a child with OCD may be help

Thank you